

**Testimony of Thomas P. Green, MD  
Professor and Chairman, Department of Pediatrics  
Children's Memorial Hospital  
Before the  
Governor's Healthcare Reform Implementation Council  
Howlett Building Auditorium  
501 S. 2nd Street, Springfield, Illinois  
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Good afternoon. On behalf of Children's Memorial Hospital, La Rabida Children's Hospital and Research Center, Comer Children's Hospital at the University of Chicago, the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and Voices for Illinois Children, we thank Governor Quinn and this Council for holding these important hearings on the future of health care in Illinois. We want to thank the governor and Director Hamos for their passion and dedication for child health issues. We pledge to work with you as you continue your important implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

Today's hearing, which focuses on Medicaid reform, is especially critical, as the current system of care for extremely ill children is under tremendous strain. I am testifying today to address what we believe is the most significant problem facing Illinois Medicaid: sick children are facing diminished access to essential pediatric specialty care caused by the Medicaid system's failure to reimburse pediatric specialists for the cost of their care. We believe that if left unaddressed and pediatric specialists are not paid more fairly, the promise of health care reform will not be realized for children because they will be unable to access pediatric specialty care.

Currently, pediatric specialists in Illinois are reimbursed just .32 cents for every dollar that it costs them to care for a child who relies on Medicaid for payment of their health care.

While rates have increased, even during these difficult financial times, for primary care, hospitals, and nursing homes, a broad increase in pediatric specialist rates has not occurred and the access to that care now is inadequate and will be irreparably harmed in the future.

What does this glaring disparity mean for the children of Illinois?

The impact of under-reimbursement is huge and it is life threatening. Under-reimbursement means that children insured by Medicaid, which currently covers 1 in 3 children in Illinois, are now waiting months for appointments to see specialists, when their conditions necessitate immediate care. Access to specialty care is crucial in keeping children stable and healthy and, in some cases, alive. These waits can often translate into worsening health conditions for these children and consequent higher costs for their treatment as their conditions become more severe.

Under-reimbursement removes immediate and necessary access to health care, it forces sick children and their parents to miss school and work so that they can find remote care to treat emergency situations. These Illinois families now drive upwards of a hundred miles for care, as pediatric cardiologists, pulmonologists, surgeons and other specialists in their own community are forced to either limit or not serve the Medicaid population. In Illinois now, critical voids of care are truly putting children at risk.

Illinois' under-reimbursement of specialty pediatricians discourages newly trained pediatric specialists from practicing in our State, further crippling Illinois' ability to provide appropriate care for children with complex and special needs.

And under-reimbursement ultimately means that all of the children in Illinois will be impacted -- whether they rely on Medicaid or have private insurance -- because without an infusion of necessary funding, the pediatric specialists who are here now and who have shouldered staggering losses will no longer be able to continue to provide care.

We are already seeing the consequences of ignoring this issue and it is being played out on the national level. For example, the American Board of Pediatrics reported that in 2009 there were only 75 pediatric endocrinologists and 23 pediatric rheumatologists in the entire nation who completed their studies. Illinois' ability to attract and retain these scarce and essential specialists is significantly hampered by our grossly inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rate.

At Children's Memorial we know this first hand: for the past few years we have been planning and building our new hospital, in partnership with the State of Illinois. Our top recruits are uniformly wary of the prospects for fair Medicaid reimbursement in Illinois, and they are worried about the impact of that under

reimbursement on their ability to provide quality of care to sick children.

We recognize that other components of the Medicaid system are also in need of reform, and it is not our intention to ignore those initiatives. However, as pediatricians, child health advocates and hospital administrators, we believe that the breakdown in our specialists' ability to deliver appropriate care is putting the health and lives of our children at risk. Physicians simply cannot continue to sustain these losses and the State must act now to protect these children.

We realize this problem is immense and that Illinois faces tremendous budget pressures. Collectively, we will embrace new delivery models if it helps us to provide quality care to our patients. But we also know there is no substitute for our children having access to quality specialty care by doctors with a track record of good outcomes for our kids.

We are the only advocates for our children and we respectfully implore you to address this issue now. Illinois must protect the well-being of our State's most vulnerable citizens - our sick children - as a top priority.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.